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An Evening Revery In The Cemetery At Woodlawn

John Arnold Keyes

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An Evening Revery in the Cemetery at Woodlawn

BY

John Arnold Keyes

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By John Arnold Keyes.

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"Peacefully the denizens of this hamlet sleep."

To Hon. H. L. Buck

In memory of many delightful hours of revery we have shared together in the days that are past.

An Evening Revery in The Cemetery at Woodlawn

Peacefully the denizens of this hamlet sleep;
No rueful noises now their slumber stir.
The hush of Nature at the close of day is deep;
The evening breeze plays lightly on yon fir.

The azure softness of the summer's sky
Heralds the night with all its minstrelsy.
Westward the amber clouds sail slowly by,
The heavens burst forth in starry brilliancy;

The wood thrush's liquid call salutes the ear,
From distant shade his answering mate replies,
From fragrant field the cricket's note I hear,
The tufted sod a grateful couch supplies.

"Thou strifeless, silent village of the dead."

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Through bending boughs the placid lake is seen,
And distant hills in somber state repose.
Majestically the river rolls between,
And here and there its limpid surface glows.

At length reclining on a crested mound
Beneath this creeper tassellated tree,
Whose clustering verdure rustles with the sound
Of softly moving winds I cannot see,

I yield myself to Fancy's dreamy sway,
To mellow measures tune the harp of thought,
And, aimlessly, upon its strings I play
The ancient tunes the pensive Muse hath taught.

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Up yonder rugged slope ascending night,
Hiding it's tangled growth, creeps slowly on,
Until last lingering rays of waning light
A moment flash aloft and then are gone.

The clustering hedges and the dew-wet lawns,
The rustic pathways, winding here and there,
The woodbine that it's fostering tree adorns,
Each to the dusky picture lends it's share.

Familiar forms and faces, far remote,
Are wrought in yonder clouds that fleck the sky;
Uncertain for a moment seem to float
And then dissolve before the searching eye.

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From landscape, sky and drowsy melody,
In retrospect I turn an inward view;
Imagination's fields spread out for me,
The ages move upon them in review.

The archaic forces rush from out the mist,
And world's and stars and suns are formed again.
To know the cause I could not if I wist,
Nor follow down the long enlinked chain;

To where man, timorous of the ocean marge,
And fearful lest each step disclose a foe,
Evolved, and spreading o'er the earth at large,
Begins the ascending stairs with foot-fall slow.

"Here high and low repose in equal calm."

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The babel of his speech, a fitful sound;
Appealing to the mystery of the night---
The roaring sea---the thunder rolling round;
A cry of pain, and wonder and affright.

The enshrouding vail now vanishes away,
New epochs enter on the waiting stage;
Man's ripening mind again renews the play,
Oer' wider fields his vision holds its sway.

Osiri's worshippers appear to me,
His sacrificial priests chant o'er their creeds,
While Nilus slowly moves to meet the sea,
Unmindful of these now forgotten deeds.

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In Isis' lofty groves I seem to stand,
And list to voices long in silence hushed,
Although their throbbing sound beats on our strand
Like ocean waves that from far fountains gushed.

Beside the purpling sea, the Master wends
His lonely way with lofty soul aglow;
While in soft climes, where tropic verdure bends,
The Buddah speaks in accents soft and low.

Rome's haughty legions, sweeping as of old,
In solid phalanx pass my covert by;
And centuries of gathered rust and mould
Cloud not the armor that my dreams supply.

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And there are they who first sought liberty---
First caught it's light upon the helmet crest;
Their forms among the hosts I dimly see;
They move with ghostly tread among the rest.

In many a lost Acropolis, perchance,
Long grown with lofty trees and tangled vines,
Deep buried lies each heroes broken lance,
And by it's shattered shaft his form reclines.

These passing spectres of the far remote,
Before me move in dumb succession slow,
Uncertain, but a moment seem to float
Before the mind, and then as quickly go.

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Image on image forms and fades away;
The awaken'd mind stays not for time nor space;
And yet each phantom seems but to display
The fleeting record of the human race.

And now I turn, from where the mystic mind
Wakes and re-robes the long denuded past,
To where the stars peer through this ivy, twined
Around this tree, and to it's trunk grown fast.

Should I repine, or once rebel at aught
That leads me soon to this benignant grove,
Where, 'neathe the myrtle and forget-me-not,
I lay me down from hence no more to rove?

"Through bending boughs the placid lake is seen."

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Nay, not if Nature's voice I would obey,
That summoned me from out the silent deep.
It is but a recall to some new day
That opens through the gateway of this sleep.

Not e'en, if here beneath this grassy sod
Were I to rest the rolling ages through,
Could there come aught to me but common good
One law to all, o'er all descends the dew.

Here high and low repose in equal calm;
No rights bestow, or longer, rights deny.
The Summer's zephyr wafts to all it's balm;
The Winter's blast o'er all it's snow heaps high,

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O'er wrought ambition finds a respite here.
The oppressor yields his sceptre and his crown.
The weak repose in peace unchilled by fear
The priest lays down his surplice and his gown.

The weary toiler finds a welcome rest.
The hoary savant yields to the unknown,
And thus forever ends his earth born quest---
To him the mystic record has been shown.

The riddle of the Universe unsolved,
Unknowing came they from the primal source;
Unknowing, also, unto dust resolved;
And thus they ran their uneventful course.

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To be but star-stuff crumpled into this,
Enclosed within the glacier moulded clay,
Nor faith could save them from the great abyss,
Nor priestly prayer prolong one life a day.

Thou strifeless, silent village of the dead,
I sometimes love along thy paths to stroll,
And pause where stately oaks their branches spread,
To read upon some shaft the lettered scroll.

Ev'n there a pride of conquest still observe
In pillared monuments of sculptured stone,
The last expiring effort to preserve
A name, if only that and that alone.

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Yet, on yon hillside, where unnumbered dead
In nameless narrow confines thickly lie,
All might as well be lain, their names unread---
No tomb the wreck of time can e'er defy.

A shrine to Hope alone the shaft should rise,
The soul's deep purpose, thus in truth expressed,
Will write it's record as Time swiftly flies
Along the spiral of his unending quest.

When they, of future time and finer mold,
Such humble efforts shall in grace excell,
Our deeper purpose will alone unfold,
Nor will our rude attempts their art repel.

"Ev'n there a pride of conquest still observe."

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For there shall live in ages yet to be,
Remolded from an infinite design,
A man superb beyond our gift to see,
Our cruder ways to soften and refine.

The quicker pulsing of whose vibrant brain
Shall far sought mysteries of life unfold;
Whose softer heart will wake a new refrain
Of brotherhood beyond the ages old.

Who then will know that he, of all earth's types,
Is conscious master of creative force---
Molder of Fate, of mind the fruitage ripe,
To shape his destiny and guide it's course.

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And list 'to spirit unto spirit call
From out the deep across the shoreless sea,
'Till on the soul no longer night shall fall,
No longer death can gain a victory.

That mortal then hath immortality---
A form beyond the zones of changing form
That will appear again and ever be---
Existent, deathless, never more-re-born,

Thus runs the slow evolving life of man
Along the steep ascent to final things,
And forms a part of the unfolding plan
That from the eternal source of order springs.

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The deepening night now warns my feet away,
To walk no more within these borders green;
This birth, no more at ending of a day
Shall I con o'er again the evening scene.

And so farewell to musing and to dreams.
The mind methinks hath found it's better part,
For all that is and also all that seems,
Must form the fabric of this weaver's art.

Perchance e'en yet when aeons shall have gone,
And I, re-clad, shall visit earth once more,
I may return thy fate to muse upon,
And here again thy ancient mounds explore.

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